R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 201 24 TE 000 177

THE VALUE OF THE CLASSICS AS AN ELECTIVE IN COLLEGE COURSES FOR THE ENGLISH MAJOR WHO INTENDS TO TEACH IN HIGH SCHOOL. INTERIM REPORT.

BY- WOLFF, JOSEPH
LOYOLA UNIV., CHICAGO, ILL.

REPORT NUMBER CRP-HE-145 PUB DATE AUG 67
REPORT NUMBER ISCPET-SS-10-30-66
REPORT NUMBER BR-5-0789
CONTRACT OEC-5-10-029
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.44 9P.

DESCRIPTORS- *CLASSICS, *ENGLISH EDUCATION, *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *TEACHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM, LITERATURE, MYTHOLOGY, DRAMA EPICS, ISCPET, LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

TO ESTABLISH WHETHER OR NOT COURSES IN THE CLASSICS AID SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE PREPARATION OF HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS, THE GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATION ADVANCED TEST ON LITERATURE (GRE) SCORES OF 11 SENIORS WHO HAD TAKEN AT LEAST ONE OF TWO CLASSICS COURSES, AT LOYOLA UNIVERSITY, ON THE THEATRE AND THE EPIC WERE COMPARED WITH THE SCORES OF STUDENTS WHO HAD COMPARABLE CUMULATIVE GRADE POINT AVERAGES. RESULTS INDICATED THAT STUDENTS WHO HAD TAKEN CLASSICS COURSES DID NOT PERFORM EXCEPTIONALLY WELL ON THE GRE, NOR DID THEY GET HIGHER SCORES THAN OTHER STUDENTS WITH COMPARABLE AVERAGES WHO HAD NOT TAKEN A COURSE IN THE CLASSICS. RESPONSES TO A QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO ALUMNI WHO TEACH ENGLISH IN HIGH SCHOOLS, HOWEVER, WERE UNIFORMLY FAVORABLE TOWARD THE MERITS OF CLASSICS COURSES THEY HAD TAKEN IN PREPARATION FOR TEACHING. THEY REPORTED THAT CLASSICS COURSES HAD SERVED TO INFORM THEM ABOUT ROMAN AND GREEK ANTIQUITY, AND THEIR TEACHING HAD BEEN STRENGTHENED BY A KNOWLEDGE OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY AND BY AN APPRECIATION OF THEIR LITERARY HERITAGE. (AUTHOR/DL)

BR-5-0789

ED015201

INTERIM REPORT

USOE Project Number HE-145
USOE Contract Number OE-5-10-029
ISCPET Subcontract Number SS-10-30-66

ILLINOIS STATE-WIDE CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER
IN THE PREPARATION OF SECONDARY
SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHERS (ISCPET)

The Value of the Classics as an Elective in College Courses for the English Major Who Intends to Teach in High School

August 1967

TE000 177

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Office of Education
Bureau of Research

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ILLINOIS STATE-WIDE CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER
IN THE PREPARATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL
ENGLISH TEACHERS (ISCPET)

The Value of the Classics as an Elective in College Courses for the English Major Who Intends to Teach in a High School

Joseph Wolff

August 1967

The research reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and to a subcontract with the Illinois State-Wide Curriculum Study Center in the Preparation of Secondary School English Teachers, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois. Contractors and subcontractors undertaking such projects under Government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their professional judgment in the conduct of the projects. Points of view or opinions stated do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

Loyola University
Chicago, Illinois

Introduction. This study has attempted to determine the value of two specific courses offered by the Classics Department and accepted for credit by the English Department. No such study has previously been made. These courses employ texts in English translations and treat The Classical Epic (English 321) and The Classic Theatre (English 327).

Method. It was decided that by comparing the results of the Graduate Record Examination of students with equal grade point averages, some estimate of the significance of these courses in the Classics might be fixed. Accordingly, two surveys have been prepared, one consisting of those students who took either or both courses in the Classics during the last five years, and the other consisting of other alumni with comparable academic records and with English as their major, but without having either of the Classics courses in question.

Then, those who had taken either course were asked for their opinions on the worth of the Classics courses in their subsequent work as high school English teachers.

Results. While this study has found no conclusive evidence of the superiority of those teachers who had taken the Classics courses, some teachers did report that they felt better prepared to undertake certain literary works than they would have been without a course in the Classics.

Discussion. Offered annually in the second summer session, English 321 (The Classical Epic) and 327 (The Classic Theatre) are elective courses available to undergraduates--many of whom regularly attend other colleges--as well as to M.A. candidates. They have been available here only in August, when comparatively few of Loyola University's full time undergraduates are attending. Furthermore, since the Loyola undergraduate English major must take a specified sequence of courses, covering the periods of British and American literature, English majors in good standing would register for either course only as an elective, and by no means as a required course.[1] The presence of many graduate students tends to strengthen the academic quality of these courses, and the professor increases their requirements.

---

1. Other Loyola undergraduates taking English 321 or 327 most likely majored in Latin or Greek (because these courses are cross-listed by the Classics Department); or they might have been English majors trying to remedy some deficiency; or they might have been upper-division students needing purely elective credit towards any other major.

But how helpful are these courses to the English major? Do they provide the student with materials useful in the Graduate Record Examination (G.R.E.[2]), and perhaps, later, in his professional work as a high school English teacher? With his knowledge of the classical myths and fables, is he significantly better prepared to assist his high school students with the information, implications, and subtleties present in the literature of England and America?

Surveying the classes of the last five years at Loyola University, this study compared the academic records of those students who secured credit for either of these courses with the records of other English majors who had approximately equal cumulative grade point averages to see if there were any significant differences in their G.R.E. percentiles and in their effectiveness as teachers of high school English. One great advantage in this survey is the fact that only a very limited number of students were involved: those who have graduated in the past five years as English majors after completing either English 321 or 327.[3] Involved are eleven individuals, all of whom majored in English and consequently took the G.R.E. To begin with, several comparisons seem profitable, comparisons involving their cumulative academic records, their grade point averages in English literature courses, their G.R.E. percentiles and their total Comprehensive results. The cumulative scores of these eleven students fill the range of the grade C, scattered between 2.10 and 2.99, on the base four, where 4.0 represents an A, 3.0 a B, and so on. Here is a chart showing their performances:

Student	Cumulative Grade Point Average	English Literature Courses: Average	G.R.E. %-ile	Comprehensive Results
I	2.99	3.4	90	Honors
II	2.86	2.6	54	Pass
III	2.76	2.66	92	Pass
IV	2.50	2.37	35	Pass

---

2. Where the G.R.E. is referred to in this report, this means the Graduate Record Examination Advanced Test in Literature. The G.R.E. is administered to all English majors as a part of the Comprehensive Examination; the other part of the Comprehensive, known as the Loyola part, consists mainly of essay type questions of an analytical or critical nature and is weighted twice as heavily as the G.R.E. in the total Comprehensive results.

3. No effort has been made to include students who completed the courses for credit towards degrees in other majors.

V	2.46	2.25	66	Pass
VI	2.44	1.80	27	Fail[4]/Pass
VII	2.42	2.10	59	Pass
VIII	2.33	2.0	31	Fail/Fail/Pass
IX	2.33	2.0	80	Pass
X	2.12	2.0	35	Fail/Pass
XI	2.10	2.55	83	Pass

The students are listed according to cumulative academic scoring, I scoring the highest, XI the lowest. The top five students took English 321 or 327 as an elective, whereas the other six took one or both courses in some "make-up" circumstance, perhaps because they had failed the Comprehensive Examination and were advised or even required to take additional work before repeating the test, or perhaps because they received a D in some other English course, and one of these courses was considered a compensation. In every instance the student took the classics course before passing the Comprehensive, although it might have been after he had completed all his other English courses.

Several of the students were apparently planning to teach in a high school, but none of those who might have been considered the best prospects. Numbers I, II, III, and XI took no Education courses; numbers VII, VIII, and IX took at least one course; and numbers IV, V, VI, and X took the Education program for secondary school teaching. Thus all the students who initially failed the Comprehensive Examination in English had some Education work; and, of the eleven students, all but one of the lowest seven took some Education courses. Looking only at the performance of these students in their English courses, the top four took no Education courses, and all the remaining seven took some Education work. Concentrating on the G.R.E. percentiles, only one of the four who qualified for the certificate in high school teaching scored higher than the 35th percentile.[5]

Other comparisons are interesting and perhaps profitable. In only two instances were the cumulative records in English courses higher than the total cumulative averages. This

---

4. Indicates that the student had to repeat the Comprehensive in a later semester.

5. It must be added here that at least three of the top four students in this selection have gone on to graduate school in some other university.

would suggest perhaps that the English Department was more demanding than the other departments combined, or perhaps that most of these eleven students would have fared better, academically, in some other major. Where the difference between the cumulative grade scores and the English grade point average is the greatest, in I, XI, VI, VII, VIII, and IX, the G.R.E. of I and XI would suggest that the student's performance in English courses was superior to his work in other subjects (compare 2.99 with 3.4 for I; or again, 2.10 with 2.55 for XI); whereas in VI, VII, VIII, and IX, the poorer candidate's English record was significantly lower than his cumulative: 1.80 to 2.44; 2.10 to 2.42, and two of 2.10 to 2.33.[6]

What of those students who preferred not to take Education courses? Graduates I, III, and XI have continuted their English studies in graduate schools; but candidate II chose not to do so. Her grade point average in English was lower than her cumulative average, 2.6 to 2.86. And her Comprehensive Examination performance is perhaps also meaningful. This test is graded so that the Loyola section, principally made up of critical essays, counts twice as much as the results of the G.R.E. Student II scored in the 54th percentile in the G.R.E. Her essays in the Loyola part of the Comprehensive were also weaker than might have been expected. Consequently, she ranked only 52nd among the 61 being examined that term. Meanwhile, students I and III, who stood just above and below her in the cumulative averages, scored in the 90th and 92nd percentiles, respectively. Performing at this level, 52nd out of 61 seniors, this student chose to teach on an Indian reservation rather than attempt graduate English work. There is a ring of bitterness in her reply to the questionnaire about courses in the Department:

> There was /in my undergraduate English courses/ such an over balance of remembering what line was so important that you had to be able to quote it in a test, whether it offered any particular value to the student or not, that the study of literature became a memory marathon. To put it simply, there was very little given to the imagination; there was the attitude that literature was a collection of printed paper somehow collected and reprinted for the express purpose of torture. . . . I once had the desire to go on with my education, and in

---

6. In the first of these, the student with the 1.80 English average had repeated setbacks: he took the Chaucer course three times, climbing from F to D to C; he had a D in another English course; his G.R.E. score is the lowest in this group; he initially failed the Comprehensive Examination. In 24 hours of Education work, his average was 2.74; he had his transcript forwarded to four graduate schools of education.

> many ways I still think it a wise and valuable endeavor. But there are so many fears hanging over me, that I decided it was a much wiser move to leave school to those who had little better way of occupying themselves.

While this graduate was displeased with what seemed grossly excessive attention to specific details, probably such objective test questions as appear in the G.R.E., there is no reason to believe that she could have handled essays in appreciation or analysis any better, particularly since the Loyola part of the Comprehensive Examination is weighted in favor of the essay type question.

But replies to the questionnaire were uniformly favorable to an inquiry about the merits of classics courses. Asked what practical use the classics courses provided high school English teachers, one graduate wrote:

> I found the Classical Epics course to be helpful in teaching /high school/ freshman English. In this particular year, the students are studying Latin and Greek mythology. The background material in the Epic course provided me with the information I needed.[7]

While the G.R.E. percentiles of those graduates who took English 321 or 327 are not impressively high, one might wonder if they were better than those of students who did not take either course. The following chart lists the percentiles of a control group, all English majors, of the same or nearly the same year, and all with comparable cumulative grade point averages.

Those with 321/327				Those without 321/327			
Student	Cumulative	English	G.R.E.	Student	Cumulative	English	G.R.E
I	2.99	3.4	90	Ia	2.99	2.7	63
II	2.86	2.6	54	IIa	2.87	2.55	25
III	2.76	2.66	92				

7. Perhaps it is significant that the texts in this high school course are probably not typical. Similarly, many of Loyola's students come from high schools where they might have been exposed to Latin.

IV	2.50	2.37	35	IVa	2.51	2.45	74
V	2.46	2.25	66	Va	2.48	2.4	66
VI	2.44	1.80	27	VIa	2.44	2.27	63
VII	2.42	2.10	59	VIIa	2.40	2.6	99++
VIII	2.33	2.0	31	VIIIa	2.31	2.0	71
IX	2.33	2.0	80				
X	2.12	2.0	35	Xa	2.12	2.0	99
XI	2.10	2.55	83				
Total averages							
	2.48	2.38	61		2.52	2.37	70

This chart reveals that those who took English 321 or 327 did not perform significantly better in the G.R.E. than those who did not take these courses. Now this might be explained away by the fact that about half of those who took either 321 or 327 were obliged to do so. However, those who took 321 or 327 for some other reason, as an elective pure and simple, gave no evidence of doing significantly better in the G.R.E. than the comparable five in the control group. Indeed, if one were to consider all the students in the control group (i.e., those who did not take 321 or 327), he would find that their average in the G.R.E. was better than the average of the best five graduates with 321 or 327. In all these averages, the study is admittedly dealing with a very small sample. Yet, looking at the individual members, and overlooking what must have been exceptional strengths or lapses, there is no appreciable difference in their performances.[8]

The evidence therefore suggests that English 321 and 327 have not improved the G.R.E. performance. However, allowing

---

8. VIIa, in the control group, is very much an exception. Neither his cumulative grade point average nor his English grades would lead one to expect the 99++ in the G.R.E. Yet this student read an enormous number of books for his own pleasure. He could not bring himself to abide by the assignments in courses, yet he might very well read the assigned texts, later, at his own convenience and pleasure. For two years he was the editor of the literary quarterly and an officer in the undergraduate literary society. Xa, on the other hand, displayed an astonishing indifference to courses. Expelled from school, he spent two years in the armed forces and then returned to finish his senior year, creditably. He passed his Comprehensive Examination the last semester. If they are exceptional, then so is IIa, in the 25th percentile.

that the G.R.E. scores show that students were not helped in appreciating or even comprehending the books read in British and American literature courses, it still remains possible that the students gained something from these courses which the G.R.E. made no effort to detect, but which the student will have found useful in high school teaching. One graduate put it this way: "I only wish that I had taken the course earlier. Understanding the Classical allusions in many poems was sometimes difficult, but the material given in the Classical Epics helped a great deal." Another alumnus found that the results were not confined to the information one took away from the course; rather it was a larger preparation for teaching that included a sense of history and culture: "the pursuit of classical learning is extremely beneficial in gaining some frame of reference from which one can view the later developments of literature both of our language as well as in those which have been affected by the Greco-Roman tradition."

Conclusion. There is no evidence to support the theory that students who have taken English 321 or 327 score higher in the G.R.E. than those who have not taken either course. But while it cannot be objectively proved that the attitudes or knowledge derived from these courses prepare graduates to become better high school English teachers, the alumni themselves believe that their teaching has profited from their having studied the Classical Epic or the Classic Theatre.

Summary. What distinguishes this study is the stress placed upon the question of the usefulness of Classics courses in the preparation of high school English teachers. Because the specific Classics courses designated for this study are only electives for the English major--indeed no course in the Classics is required for the English major--the results of the Graduate Record Examination were scrutinized to uncover evidence that these courses significantly contributed to the teacher's preparation. Contrary to expectations, the Graduate Record scores of those who had taken the Classics courses on the epic and theatre revealed no substantial difference from the scores of a controlled group of students who had the same cumulative academic scores but who had not taken the Classics courses. Correspondence from the alumni who had taken the Classics courses uniformly praised the courses as helpful in their teaching preparation.